WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1.   An image search apparatus which searches for an image by using

image storage means for storing a plurality of

5 images,

region information storage means for storing partial images included in the respective images stored in the image storage means in correspondence with the respective images, and

10   region feature storage means for storing features of the partial images stored in the region information storage means in correspondence with the partial images, comprising:

image feature designation means for designating a

15 feature of a search target image;

candidate image determination means for searching features of partial images in the region feature storage means on the basis of the feature of the image which is designated by said image feature designation

20 means, and determining an image which is made to correspond to a partial image obtained on the basis of a search result as a candidate image from the images stored in the image storage means; and

search result display means for displaying a

25 reduced image of the candidate image determined by said candidate image determination means,

wherein said search result display means displays

a reduced image of the candidate image upon enlarging the partial image included in the candidate image.

2. The apparatus according to claim 1, characterized in that when a plurality of candidate images are

5   obtained on the basis of a search result, said search result display means displays reduced images of the plurality of candidate images in the form of a list.

3. An image search apparatus which searches for an image by using

10   image storage means for storing a plurality of images,

region information storage means for storing partial images included in the respective images stored in the image storage means in correspondence with the

15   respective images, and

region feature storage means for storing features of the partial images stored in the region information storage means in correspondence with the partial images, comprising:

20   image feature designation means for designating a feature of a search target image;

candidate image determination means for searching features of partial images in the region feature storage means on the basis of the feature of the image

25   which is designated by said image feature designation means, and determining an image which is made to correspond to a plurality of partial images obtained on

the basis of a search result as a candidate image from the images stored in the image storage means; and

search result display means for displaying a reduced image of the candidate image determined by said

5   candidate image determination means,

wherein said search result display means displays a reduced image of the candidate image upon enlarging the plurality of partial images included in the candidate image.

10   4.   The apparatus according to claim 3, characterized in that said search result display means synthesizes the plurality of partial images to generate a new single partial image, and displays the new single partial image as a reduced image.

15   5.   The apparatus according to claim 4, characterized in that said search result display means generates a new single partial image by synthesizing the plurality of partial images while a relative positional relationship between the plurality of partial images is

20   kept.

6.   The apparatus according to claim 3, characterized in that when the plurality of partial images partly overlap, said search result display means generates a new single partial image by synthesizing the plurality

25   of partial images.

7.   The apparatus according to claim 3, characterized in that sizes of the plurality of partial images are

unified to a predetermined size.

8. An image search apparatus which searches for an image by using

image storage means for storing a plurality of

5   images,

region information storage means for storing partial images included in the respective images stored in the image storage means in correspondence with the respective images, and

10 region feature storage means for storing features of the partial images stored in the region information storage means in correspondence with the partial images, comprising:

image feature designation means for designating a

15 feature of a search target image;

candidate image determination means for searching features of partial images in the region feature storage means on the basis of the feature of the image which is designated by said image feature designation

20 means, and determining an image which is made to correspond to a partial image obtained on the basis of a search result as a candidate image from the images stored in the image storage means; and

search result display means for displaying a

25 reduced image of the candidate image determined by said candidate image determination means in a plurality of patterns.

9.   The apparatus according to claim 8, characterized in that said search result display means displays the plurality of reduced images in the form of a list.

10.   The apparatus according to claim 8, characterized
5   in that said search result display means displays a reduced image of the candidate image.

11.   The apparatus according to claim 8, characterized in that said search result display means displays a reduced image of the partial image used to determine
10   the candidate image.

12.   The apparatus according to claim 8, characterized in that said search result display means alternately displays the reduced images at the same position one by one in an automatic manner.

15   13.   The apparatus according to claim 8, characterized in that

the apparatus further comprises switching means for switching display of the reduced images in said search result display means, and

20   said search result display means alternately displays the reduced images at the same position one by one on the basis of a switching instruction from said switching means.

14.   The apparatus according to claim 1, characterized
25   in that said search result display means displays the reduced image in an area with a predetermined size.

15.   The apparatus according to claim 1, characterized

in that the partial image comprises a rectangular image having a region surrounded by a circumscribed rectangle of a predetermined object region included in the image.

16.   The apparatus according to claim 1, characterized in that said search result display means displays a reduced image of the candidate image while emphasizing the partial image included in the candidate image.

17.   The apparatus according to claim 1, characterized in that the region feature storage means stores, as a feature of the image, at least one of concept information expressing a concept obtained from the partial image, language information expressing the concept in a language, an image feature expressing a feature of the partial image, and a combination of the concept information, the language information, and the image feature.

18.   An image search method for an image search apparatus which can be connected to

an image storage unit which stores a plurality of images,

a region information storage unit which stores partial images included in the respective images stored in the image storage unit in correspondence with the respective images, and

a region feature storage unit which stores features of the partial images stored in the region information storage unit in correspondence with the

partial images, comprising:

an image feature designation step of designating a feature of a search target image;

a candidate image determination step of searching

5　features of partial images in the region feature storage unit on the basis of the designated feature of the image, and determining an image which is made to correspond to a partial image obtained on the basis of a search result as a candidate image from the images

10　stored in the image storage unit; and

a search result display step of enlarging the partial image included in the determined candidate image and displaying a reduced image of the candidate image.

15　19. An image search method for an image search apparatus which can be connected to

an image storage unit which stores a plurality of images,

a region information storage unit which stores

20　partial images included in the respective images stored in the image storage unit in correspondence with the respective images, and

a region feature storage unit which stores features of the partial images in the region

25　information storage unit in correspondence with the partial images, comprising:

an image feature designation step of designating

a feature of a search target image;

a candidate image determination step of searching features of partial images stored in the region feature storage unit on the basis of the designated feature of

5 the image, and determining an image which is made to correspond to a plurality of partial images obtained on the basis of a search result as a candidate image from the images stored in the image storage unit; and

a search result display step of enlarging the

10 plurality of partial images included in the determined candidate image and displaying a reduced image of the candidate image.

20. An image search method for an image search apparatus which can be connected to

15 an image storage unit which stores a plurality of images,

a region information storage unit which stores partial images included in the respective images stored in the image storage unit in correspondence with the

20 respective images, and

a region feature storage unit which stores features of the partial images stored in the region information storage unit in correspondence with the partial images, comprising:

25 an image feature designation step of designating a feature of a search target image;

a candidate image determination step of searching

features of partial images in the region feature

storage unit on the basis of the designated feature of

the image, and determining an image which is made to

correspond to a partial image obtained on the basis of

5   a search result as a candidate image from the images

stored in the image storage unit; and

a search result display step of displaying a

reduced image of the determined candidate image in a

plurality of patterns.

10   21.   A program for causing a computer, which can be

connected to

an image storage unit which stores a plurality of

images,

a region information storage unit which stores

15   partial images included in the respective images stored

in the image storage unit in correspondence with the

respective images, and

a region feature storage unit which stores

features of the partial images in the region

20   information storage unit in correspondence with the

partial images, to execute

an image feature designation step of designating

a feature of a search target image;

a candidate image determination step of searching

25   features of partial images in the region feature

storage unit on the basis of the designated feature of

the image, and determining an image which is made to

correspond to a partial image obtained on the basis of a search result as a candidate image from the images stored in the image storage unit; and

a search result display step of enlarging the partial image included in the determined candidate image and displaying a reduced image of the candidate image.

22. A computer-readable recording medium storing a program defined in claim 21.